7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

salt may produce its effects it must be thrown by a married woman, not by a maiden. 755 757

IL *GHAGIUSA*

We have an old custom in Malta to make children believe that the *ghagiusa* (the oldest woman living in the parish) is killed at noon on Thursday, the middle of Lent. 857 888

Mothers, after fasting the first twenty days of lent, send their children to the door of the parish church, or of some convent to see the sexton or some friar throwing the old woman from the steeple down below. [785]

The disappointment of the children is indeed very great when at noon, they don't see the *ghagiusa* thrown down.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

538 the Arab domination. Jahan is merely a typically Maltese character placed in a series of foreign settings which have been changed to give an appearance of authenticity.

THE PEASANT AND THE SULTAN

539 From the familiar ground of Jahan's adventures it is a long step to the tale of "The Kaukam and the Kaukama." Here, again, is the typical Maltese hero who, by superior cunning, outwits the "Sultan"[1] who sets him, a poor peasant, a series of impossible tasks, but the atmosphere of the story is of the distant past.

> "Upon a time there was a peasant who loved his father as the light of his eyes. When the father became very old and decrepid, the son was obliged to do as everyone else did; he had to put his father into a cave-tomb; but he could not bring himself to block up the mouth of the cave. . . . He kept two holes. . . ."

The son then arranges to feed his father by leading his ewes to the cave, so that the old man may suck their milk through one of the holes.[2]

539 ●888 It has been suggested that the burial of the aged father who is kept alive and his advice sought is nothing more than a tradition of oracular response from ancestral tombs. Although this is a reasonable enough theory, there seems no cause to doubt the possibility that the facts are exactly as stated. To this day primitive tribes get rid of their aged and infirm members, for obvious reasons. Respect for the wisdom and experience of the old men and women whose advice was sufficiently valuable

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[1] There is no Maltese word for "king," "ruler" or "governor." "Sultan" is used in folk-tales broadly to describe any person in authority. The Italian "re" is rarely used in the true vernacular.

[2] L. GALEA AND MARGARET A. MURRAY, *Maltese Folk Tales*.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
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to justify the inconvenience of caring for them is a lesson which had to be learned. "Ghalec ma tridx tmut l'ghagiusa, ghax actar ma ticber izjed titghallem"—"The old woman does not want to die for the older she grows the more she learns"—is a common saying. For further proof that the story of the "Kaukam" has come down from very early times, there is the only other context in which the word *ghagiusa* means "an old woman" or, more accurately, "the oldest woman hereabouts" (normally the word means "a crab").

> "We have an old custom in Malta," says Bussutil,[1] "to make children believe that the ghagiusa is killed at noon on Thursday, the middle of Lent. Mothers, after fasting the first twenty days of Lent, send their children to the door of the parish church, or of some convent to see the sexton or some friar throwing the old woman from the steeple. . . ."

That the destruction of the old woman should occur in the middle of Lent—a period of fasting—is too much of a coincidence not to indicate that, in times when food was scarce, the aged folk were removed—either by being thrown from a high place or, to save the guilt of actual murder, walled up in a rock tomb, as in the case of the peasant. The association of the Church with the destruction of the *ghagiusa* suggests that in primitive times the removal of the aged was the responsibility of the pagan priests who performed the "ritual murders." These murders may have developed from a practical necessity into a sacrificial propitiation.

The story of the Kaukam takes its name from the ancient's first piece of advice to his perplexed son. Faced with the probability of losing his own crops while he cares for those of the Sultan, who has commanded that no man may plant his

[1] GALEA AND MURRAY, op. cit.